

## Richard Dyer

### STARS AS IMAGES

**L**OOKING AT STARS AS a social phenomenon indicates that, no matter where one chooses to put the emphasis in terms of the stars' place in the production-consumption dialectic of the cinema, that place can still only be fully understood ideologically. The questions, 'Why stardom?' and 'Why such-and-such a star?', have to be answered in terms of ideology – ideology being, as it were, the terms in which the production-consumption dialectic is articulated.

With stars, the 'terms' involved are essentially images. By 'image' here I do not understand an exclusively visual sign, but rather a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs. This configuration may constitute the general image of stardom or of a particular star. It is manifest not only in films but in all kinds of media text.

As suggested [ . . . ], star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to 'manage' or resolve. In exceptional cases, it has been argued that certain stars, far from managing contradictions, either expose them or embody an alternative or oppositional ideological position (itself usually contradictory) to dominant ideology. The 'subversiveness' of these stars can be seen in terms of 'radical intervention' (not necessarily conscious) on the part of themselves or others who have used the potential meanings of their image – the struggles of Mae West, Greta Garbo, Bette Davis and Barbra Streisand over representation (expressed as a demand for 'decent parts for women') would clearly suggest them as interventionists. However, the question of subversion need not be conceptualised in this way. One can think of it simply as a clash of codes, quite possibly fortuitous, in which the very clash or else the intensity with which the alternative/oppositional code is realised result in 'subversion' (or, at any rate, make reading them 'subversively' possible or legitimate). The discussion of images in this part looks at examples of stars and ideological contradiction, both in terms of how they are grounded in such contradictions and how they 'manage' or 'subvert' them.

## 1 Stars as stars

In this first section I want to look briefly at some of the characteristics of the overall image of stardom. This general image forms a background to the more specific analyses of particular stars in sections 2 and 3.

Stardom is an image of the way stars live. For the most part, this generalised life-style is the assumed backdrop for the specific personality of the star and the details and events of his or her life. As it combines the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary, and is seen as an articulation of basic American/Western values, there is no conflict here between the general life-style and the particularities of the star. In certain cases, however, the relationship between the two may be ambivalent or problematic. Marilyn Monroe's aspiration to the condition of stardom and her unhappiness on attaining it are part of the pathetic/tragic side of her image. Much of the early publicity surrounding Marlon Brando concerns his unshaven, unkempt appearance and his unruly behaviour at parties, matters that signified a rejection of the general life-style of stardom. Jane Fonda has sought in recent years to negotiate stardom politically – that is, to maintain a certain level of star glamour in order to connect with the predominant culture of working people while at the same time gaining credibility for her progressive views by living in an ordinary house in an ordinary working-class neighbourhood.

I have illustrated this section chiefly from *The Talkies, Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines* and *Photoplay Treasury*<sup>1</sup>. As these all cover much the same period (the twenties to the forties), the image that emerges is essentially that of Hollywood's classic period. It might be useful to compare this with contemporary film magazines (e.g. *Photoplay, ABC Film Review, Modern Screen, Films and Filming*) to see where the different emphases lie – e.g. fashion seems less important now than sex, there is perhaps more interest in films as such, the 'dream' of stardom is more jaded and sour. (The emphases also differ, of course, from one publication to another.)

The general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American dream, organised around the themes of consumption, success and ordinariness. Throughout, however, there is an undertow that, as it were, 'sours' the dream. In addition, love, marriage and sex are constants of the image.

### Consumption

The way stars lived is one element in the 'fabulousness' of Hollywood. One can approach this in different ways.

#### i) *An anatomy of the life style*

A list of the recurrent features of that life style would include, to begin with, swimming pools, large houses, sumptuous costumes, limousines, parties, etc. Let us look at the connotations of one of those features, fashion.

For instance what meanings are packed into the recurrent image of women stars as leaders of fashion? If we look at the article 'See These Latest Chanel Styles in

Gloria's Picture', the face of the world of *haute couture*, with its exclusiveness. A certain interest on the part of the reader [in the draperies] to a black velvet used is stressed (satin, for conspicuous consumption) hanging pieces that would be passing, the activity of a woman as spectacle, a theme 'Motoring Beauty Hints' *Treasury* pp. 132-4 & 286- add to the good looks of the last examples show, how appeal, etc.) were also to be of the *haute couture* with emphasis over the years in an arbiter of fashion. (The fashion from Paris styles during the 1920s snubs Paris. Movie capital longer looks to "shabby" Paris. The fact of Paris as a leader of fashion in a democracy can do just as well as value is still asserted, with provenance, in the discourse.

One could similarly identify clusters – sport, dances,

#### ii) *Conspicuous consumption*

Thorstein Veblen made the distinction in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Conspicuous consumption is the fact that they are wealthy on a scale on which they consume also the fact that they do not have to work, but his patterns the signs of his wealth of taste, wearing clothes not clearly made work imposed for the wearer, as they see activities such as sport or the sake of displaying the athletic body may be much through sports not labour

These themes emerge in 'Stars off the screen' and 'Stars on the screen' non-working life is present

Gloria's Picture', the fact that the designer is Chanel links Gloria Swanson to the world of *haute couture*, with its connotations of high society, European 'taste' and exclusiveness. A certain inwardness with the idiosyncrasies of couturiers is assumed on the part of the reader by a remark like 'Who but Chanel would add [wing-like draperies] to a black velvet evening gown?' Equally, the expensiveness of the materials used is stressed (satin, fur, jewels), while the designs themselves are examples of 'conspicuous consumption' (see below), with their yards of material and awkward hanging pieces that would make any form of industry (including, be it noted in passing, the activity of acting) impossible. Finally, all of this promotes the notion of woman as spectacle, a theme that is even more insistent in other articles such as 'Motoring Beauty Hints' and 'How I keep my figure' (by Betty Grable) (*Photoplay Treasury* pp. 132-4 & 286-7), and 'Beauty "Tips" from the Beautiful - Little things that add to the good looks of the stars could add, also, to your own attractions'.<sup>2</sup> As these last examples show, however, fashion and notions of beauty (charm/glamour/sex-appeal, etc.) were also to be shared by star and fan. In this context, the 'exclusiveness' of the *haute couture* connection was problematic, and in fact there is increasing emphasis over the years in the fan magazines on the idea of Hollywood itself as the arbiter of fashion. (The ascendancy was finally achieved by America's being cut off from Paris styles during World War II.) This is indicated by the article 'Hollywood snubs Paris. Movie capital is self-reliant as a style center. Designer [Travis Banton] no longer looks to "shabby" Paris for ideas'. (*The Talkies* pp.192-3, 347) In this article, the fact of Paris as a leader of fashion is rejected with the implication that America and/or democracy can do just as well. At the same time, the notion of 'taste' as an absolute value is still asserted, without any recognition of the relativity of the term or its provenance, in the discourse of fashion; namely, Paris . . .

One could similarly explore the associations and contradictions of other image clusters - sport, dances, architecture (of the stars' homes), and so on.

#### ii) *Conspicuous consumption*

Thorstein Veblen made the notion of conspicuous consumption central to his *Theory of the Leisure Class*. Conspicuous consumption is the way by which the wealthy display the fact that they are wealthy. It displays not only the fact that they have wealth in the scale on which they consume and their access to the canons of taste and fashion, but also the fact that they do not have to work. Women are crucial in this process - a man may have to work, but his wife must not. It is she who carries in her consumption patterns the signs of his wealth. Fashion is one example of this - access to the canons of taste, wearing clothes made of expensive materials in exclusive designs, designs that clearly made work impossible and are even, in the pursuit of this aim, debilitating for the wearer, as they squeeze, shape, mis-shape and constrict her body. Equally, activities such as sport or the arts are not pursued for health or enlightenment but for the sake of displaying the leisure time and money at one's disposal. Thus a man's athletic body may be much admired, but only on condition that it has been acquired through sports not labour.

These themes emerge very clearly in an analysis of the fan magazines: 'Hollywood at Play' and 'Stars off the Set', for instance,<sup>3</sup> the latter showing how a star's non-working life is presented as consisting in sports and hobbies. What is suppressed,

or only fleetingly acknowledged, in these articles is that making films is work, that films are produced. An interestingly self-conscious play on this occurs in the article. 'Those Awful Factories' with a spread of pictures of stars 'at work' in their sumptuous studio dressing rooms. Even on the shop-floor, stars are not shown working, that is, making films. (Note also the delineation of sex roles by decor.)

iii) *Idols of consumption*

Leo Lowenthal in his study of biographies in popular magazines noted a marked shift in emphasis between 1901 and 1941. In the earlier period the biographies' subjects were 'idols of production' – people interesting because they achieved something in the world, made their own way, worked their way to the top, were useful to society: bankers, politicians, artists, inventors, businessmen. In the intervening years however there is a shift to 'idols of consumption'. Of 'present-day magazine heroes':

... almost every one . . . is directly, or indirectly, related to the sphere of leisure time: either he does not belong to vocations which serve society's basic needs (e.g. the heroes of the world of entertainment and sport), or he amounts, more or less, to a caricature of a socially productive agent. (p.115)

Contemporary heroes 'stem predominantly from the sphere of consumption and organised leisure time' (p.121) (i.e. they are entertainers or sportspeople), and equally their 'private' lives are lives of consumption. So '. . . in the course of the presentation the producers and agents of consumer goods change into their own customers'. (ibid.)

Although Veblen's account of the way in which leisure, dress, consumption patterns, etc. bespeak wealth is useful in the analysis of the image of stardom, Lowenthal's model perhaps comes closer to the social significance of all this consumption. For whereas with Veblen conspicuous consumption preserves the leisure class as a distinctive class, with Lowenthal the stars become models of consumption for everyone in a consumer society. They may spend more than the average person, but nonetheless they can be, on a smaller scale, imitated. Their fashions are to be copied, their fads followed, their sports pursued, their hobbies taken up. Heroes, in Lowenthal's words, are 'a lot of guys [sic] who like or dislike highballs, cigarettes, tomato juice, golf and social gatherings . . .' (p.135) We may note that many economists (e.g. Galbraith, Baran and Sweezy) consider that during the twentieth century capitalism has shifted decisively from an economy based on production to one based on consumption – that the 'problem' for capitalism is not how to produce enough for the market but how to sell the amount produced in excess of immediate market demand.<sup>4</sup> A connection between this and the growth of 'idols of consumption' irresistibly suggests itself, the idols expressing in ideological form the economic imperatives of society – though the neatness of the connection should perhaps also make us wary.

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The film-star legend who was quickly elevated from log-cabin-to-White-House folk-lore.

The myth of success is grounded in a network, does not apply to the individual. It is whether success is possible, and how, largely as developed in the structure of the system. Contradictory elements: (i) the system rewards talent; (ii) success happens to anyone; (iii) the system typifies the system. Rewards and punishment are necessary for the system to work with others only some aspects of the system are things to be true.

The Jolson Story as a paradigm

The Hollywood 'biopic' illustrates the contradictory cornerstones of the system. He holds together all four elements: (i) a Jewish family – he has no 'celebrity' beautiful voice, which captivated the audience; (ii) singing a vaudeville matinee, singing one else stops to listen); (iii) performing, Jolson goes on in the theatre; (iv) happen to be in the theatre; new aspects to his act, taking the film is the activity of the 'business' of show business. The 'business' of show business were carried up through the such as *The Great Ziegfeld*, success

The myth of success also conspicuous consumption. But success but *money* is worth having through salary'. What they exist is 'achievement' gives them the elite that C. Wright Mills in 7

## Success

Albert McLean in his study of vaudeville, *American Vaudeville as Ritual*, has shown how this form was built around the myth of success. The cinema derived the star system from this theatre, and with it the emphasis on the star as a symbol of success.

The general meaning of the myth of success is that American society is sufficiently open for anyone to get to the top, regardless of rank. As Daniel Boorstin puts it:

The film-star legend of the accidentally discovered soda-fountain girl who was quickly elevated to stardom soon took its place alongside the log-cabin-to-White-House legend as a leitmotif of American democratic folk-lore.

(*The Image*, p.162)

The myth of success is grounded in the belief that the class system, the old-boy network, does not apply to America. However, one of the myth's ambiguities is whether success is possible for anyone, regardless of talent or application. Particularly as developed in the star system, the success myth tries to orchestrate several contradictory elements: (i) that ordinariness is the hallmark of the star; (ii) that the system rewards talent and 'specialness'; (iii) that luck, 'breaks', which may happen to anyone typify the career of the star; and (iv) that hard work and professionalism are necessary for stardom. Some stars reconcile all four elements, while with others only some aspects are emphasised. Stardom as a whole holds all four things to be true.

### The Jolson Story as a paradigm of the myth of success

The Hollywood 'biopic' illustrates in its charting of a star's rise to fame these contradictory cornerstones of the success myth. *The Jolson Story* is paradigmatic, managing to hold together all four elements: (i) Jolson is just an ordinary guy from an ordinary Jewish family – he has no 'connections', no wealth; (ii) Jolson has an exceptionally beautiful voice, which captivates audiences (e.g. in the early scene where he is attending a vaudeville matinée, singing along in the audience, but so beautifully that everyone else stops to listen); (iii) it is just lucky that when a fellow artiste is too drunk to perform, Jolson goes on in his stead on the very night that two leading impresarios happen to be in the theatre; (iv) Jolson is a dedicated professional, always inventing new aspects to his act, taking on the challenge of movies, etc. What is suppressed in the film is the activity of the machinery of impresarios, agents, producers, backers – the 'business' of show business. Jolson never gets to be active in that sphere, he is as it were carried up through the machinery. Interestingly, even films about producers, such as *The Great Ziegfeld*, suppress examination of this.

The myth of success also suggests that success is worth having – in the form of conspicuous consumption. Barry King<sup>5</sup> has suggested that the stars imply that not only success but money is worth having, that the stars 'are models of rapid social mobility through salary'. What they earn (not class connections, breeding, education or 'artistic' achievement) gives them access to the world of good living, to that part of the élite that C. Wright Mills in *The Power Elite* calls 'café society'. Thus, argues King, the

stars as successes can be seen as affirming 'in fantasised form' wage earning, selling one's labour power on the market, as a worthwhile goal in life.

### *Ordinariness – are stars 'different'?*

One of the problems in coming to grips with the phenomenon of stardom is the extreme ambiguity/contradiction, already touched on, concerning the stars-as-ordinary and the star-as-special. Are they just like you or me, or do consumption and success transform them into (or reflect) something different?

Violette Morin suggests that in the case of superstars ('Les Olympiens', the title of her article), they are believed to be different *in kind* from other people. She sees this as stemming from the way stars are treated as superlatives. Stars are always the most something-or-other in the world – the most beautiful, the most expensive, the most sexy. But because stars are 'dissolved' into this superlative, are indistinguishable from it, they *become* superlative, hence they seem to be of a different order of being, a different 'ontological category'. Their image becomes gradually generalised, so that from being, say, the most beautiful they become simply 'the greatest'.

One of Morin's examples is Elizabeth Taylor, and the points she makes about her are similar to those made by Alexander Walker in his chapter on Taylor in *Sex in the Movies*. Whereas other stars may stand for types of people, Taylor stands for the type 'star' – the most expensive, the most beautiful, and the most married and divorced, being in the world. Her love life plus her sheer expensiveness are what make her interesting, not her similarity to you or me.

Walker does not claim that Taylor is typical of all stars, and it is not clear how wide Morin would define her category of 'Olympien'. I am myself not persuaded that a belief in the ontological difference of the stars is at all widespread. Even the case of Taylor seems to me suspect, for it does not take into account the way in which her love life may be paradigmatic of the problems of heterosexual monogamy (see below), nor does it deal with, for instance, the 'common-ness' of her playing in *Cleopatra* or her particular success when playing 'bitch' roles.

The paradox of the extravagant life-style and success of the stars being perceived as ordinary may be explained in several ways:

- i) Stars can be seen as ordinary people who live more expensively than the rest of us but are not essentially transformed by this.
- ii) The wealth and success of the stars can be seen as serving to isolate certain human qualities (the qualities they stand for), without the representation of those qualities being muddled by material considerations or problems.

Both (i) and (ii) fit with notions that human attributes exist independently of material circumstances. Stars may serve to legitimate such notions.

- iii) Stars represent what are taken to be people typical of this society; yet the types of people we assume characterise our society may nevertheless be singularly absent from our actual day-to-day experience of society; the specialness of stars

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### *The dream soured*

Consumption and success, with their intimations of attendant values such as democracy, the open society, the value of the common/ordinary person, are the key notes of the image of stardom, but it would be wrong I think to ignore elements that run counter to this. Through the star system, failures of the dream are also represented.

Both consumption and success are from time to time shown to be wanting. Consumption can be characterised as wastefulness and decadence, while success may be short-lived or a psychological burden. The fan magazines carried articles such as 'The Tragedy of 15,000 Extras' (about people who don't get lucky breaks – 'Struggling to win a place in the cinema sun, they must put behind them forever their dreams of screen success'), 'They, Too, Were Stars' (about big stars who have declined into obscurity), 'Tragic Mansions' (about the superstitions that have grown up around the dwellings that stand as 'monuments of shattered careers') and 'The Price They Pay for Fame' ('In Hollywood, Health, Friends, Beauty, even Life Itself, are Sacrificed on the Altar of Terrible Ambition'; see *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*, pp.94–5).<sup>6</sup> These are all from the thirties. The themes of decadence, sexual licence and wanton extravagance emerged more strongly in the fifties and sixties, not only in fan magazines and the press but also in novels and even films set in Hollywood (e.g. *Valley of the Dolls*). Yet even the 'Tragic Mansions' article is sub-headed 'the strange story of heartbreak houses in heartbreak town', implying that the idea of tragedy and suffering being endemic to Hollywood was commonplace. These perspectives, and much else of the image of Hollywood stardom, come across in this extract from the semi-pornographic pulp novel *Naked in Hollywood* by Bob Lucas. Carla is on her way to Hollywood, in the company of a second-rate agent named Herb:

Carla could not recall the precise moment she decided she would become a star. As she grew older it seemed that the dream was born in her. She had no illusions about developing into a great actress. It was the glamour, the make-believe, the beauty, the adulation that were the increments of stardom that bedazzled her. She knew more about Hollywood – that part of it she was interested in – than Herb could ever tell her.

The heart-shaped swimming pools, the Rolls Royces, the estates, the mink and ermine, Scotch and champagne – all this she knew as intimately as if she had created the Technicolor paradise where dwelt the screen gods and goddesses.

Rita, Eva, Liz and Marilyn; Rock, Tab, Rip and Frankie – their real names, their broken romances and artistic triumphs, even their pet peeves and favourite foods were part of the movieland lore Carla had crammed into her brain. Books, fan magazines and newspaper columns were the source of her knowledge. Now she was headed for the promised land and had not the slightest doubt that one day in the not too distant future she would join the ranks of the immortals.

Hollywood – it can break your heart, rip out your guts, Herb had warned. Carla was not impressed. To become a star, she was prepared to trade her immortal soul.

The recognition of Hollywood as a destroyer was perhaps most forcibly expressed by the deaths of Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland, whose ruined lives and possible suicides were laid at the door of Hollywood's soulless search for profits. Latterly, Monroe has also come to symbolise the exploitation of woman as spectacle in film.

### Love

A central theme in all the fan magazines is love. This is achieved partly by the suppression of film-making as work and partly by the over-riding sense of a world in which material problems have been settled and all that is left is relationships. These relationships are invariably heterosexual emotional/erotic ones – 'love' – and the magazines carry the implication that these are the only kinds of relationship of any interest to anyone – not relationships of, for instance, work, friendship, political comradeship or, surprisingly enough, parents and children. (Births are featured, it is true, but seldom the developing relationship of a star and her/his child.) One can see this as diverting mass attention away from such areas, as indeed it does, although it is also worth remembering that the majority of the audience was (and still is) placed within the structures and expectations of heterosexual relationships. What is interesting about the fan magazines is that, despite Edgar Morin's views in *The Stars*, love is often not so much celebrated as agonised over.

Morin sees the essence of the myth of stardom as love. Love, that is, intense heterosexual passion, he sees as forming the substance of writing about the stars, carrying with it the implication that life is about love. This has various manifestations, notably the obsession with physical beauty and youth (caught in the paradoxical pair of clichés that 'the heart is ageless' because it is 'always twenty', p. 175) and the magic of the kiss:

The kiss is not only the key technique of love-making, nor the cinematic substitute for intercourse forbidden by censorship: it is the triumphant symbol of the role of the face and the soul in twentieth century love. The kiss is of a piece with the eroticism of the face, both unknown in ancient times and still unknown in certain civilisations. The kiss is not only the discovery of a new tactile voluptuousness. It brings to life unconscious myths which identify the breath from one's mouth with the soul; it thus symbolises a communication or symbiosis of souls. The kiss is not only the piquancy in all Western films. It is the profound expression of a complex of love which eroticises the soul and mystifies the body. (p. 179)

Love then ceases to be a question of physical and practical relations and becomes a metaphysical experience.

Certainly this notion of love is promoted by films and by articles in the fan magazines, but what emerges far more strongly from an examination of the latter is a

concern with the *problems* of 'The Inside Story of Joan's I with Lombard? Is it true that recent unprecedented behavior (pp. 106–7, 196), 'Why is Be Years?' (pp. 110–2, 198–9), mergers and tangles, the B (pp. 114–5, 199–200; all quot the attempt is made to blame divorces, quarrels, etc. In 'W 183–4) it is suggested that ro love thrives on romantic secr about the effect of on-screen

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However, putting the blame c that what these articles are rea notions of romance and pass monogamy. Thus in addition t the-blame-on-Hollywood pie Hollywood romances – wheth 'Afraid of a Broken Heart' by C pp. 148–9) or tips on keepin Movie Star – or to Anybody fo connection with the readers' c themselves also carry message: woman and a man's correct Bennett '... knew fame and w a husband who was brilliant, fa happy. But always, despite al herself, something was missing have the love that every worr p. 177). Bette Davis' marriag

It's asking a lot of a mar partnership indefinitely - matter how much a man to be happy in the role with just-a-gigolo, say he with a 'Mr.' attached.



concern with the *problems* of love. Articles with titles like the following predominate: 'The Inside Story of Joan's Divorce' (Joan Bennett) (pp.30-1), 'What's the Matter with Lombard? Is it true that her marriage to Clark Gable is responsible for Carole's recent unprecedented behaviour?' (pp. 56-7, 181-2), 'Tarzan Seeks a Divorce' (pp. 106-7, 196), 'Why is Bette Living without her Husband - after Six Compatible Years?' (pp. 110-2, 198-9), and 'This Year's Love Market' (dealing with 'the marital mergers and tangles, the Blessed and not so Blessed Events of the past year') (pp. 114-5, 199-200; all quotes from *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*). Frequently the attempt is made to blame Hollywood itself for the endless round of marriages, divorces, quarrels, etc. In 'What's Wrong with Hollywood Love?' (ibid., pp. 60-2, 183-4) it is suggested that romance cannot flourish under the glare of publicity ('real love thrives on romantic secrecy', (p.61). 'The High Price of Screen Love-Making', about the effect of on-screen romance on off-screen relationships, observes:

Be reasonable. If you spent a day in Ronald Colman's arms, could you forget it? Or, if you are a man, and you had spent eight hours clasping and unclasping, kissing and un-kissing Marlene Dietrich - would you forget it? Could you go home to your sweet, thoughtful, kind loving mate and swear to yourself that such days had made no impression on you!

(*Photoplay Treasury*, pp. 200-1)

However, putting the blame on Hollywood seems to be a way of disguising the fact that what these articles are really doing is endlessly raking over the problems posed by notions of romance and passion within the institution of compulsory heterosexual monogamy. Thus in addition to the display of romantic-marital agony and the putting-the-blame-on-Hollywood pieces, there are also those that draw a 'lesson' from Hollywood romances - whether it be the value of endurance and suffering ('Don't be Afraid of a Broken Heart' by Olivia de Havilland, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*, pp. 148-9) or tips on keeping a marriage together (e.g. 'How to Stay Married to a Movie Star - or to Anybody for that matter', *Photoplay Treasury*, pp. 134-7 - here the connection with the readers' own problems is made explicit). And the divorce stories themselves also carry messages as to what a proper marriage really consists in, what a woman and a man's correct role and essential needs are. Thus we learn that Joan Bennett '... knew fame and wealth and popularity. She had a beautiful home. She had a husband who was brilliant, fascinating, devoted. She had every outward reason to be happy. But always, despite all that she said in her interviews and tried to believe herself, something was missing from her happiness. In her heart of hearts, she did not have the love that every woman lives to have.' (*Hollywood and Great Fan Magazines*, p. 177). Bette Davis' marriage to Harmon Nelson is breaking up because:

It's asking a lot of a man to expect him to be the lesser half of a marital partnership indefinitely - the lesser in income, the lesser in prestige. No matter how much a man loves his wife, it's almost too much to expect him to be happy in the role of just-a-husband, in which people confuse him with just-a-gigolo, say he's living on her salary, and call him by her name with a 'Mr.' attached.

(ibid., p.112)

## 2 Stars as types

Despite the extravagant life-style of the stars, elements such as the rags-to-riches motif and romance as an enactment of the problems of heterosexual monogamy suggest that what is important about the stars, especially in their particularity, is their typicality or representativeness. Stars, in other words, relate to the social types of a society.

### *The notion of social type*

The notion of a type – or rather a social type – has been developed by O.E. Klapp, and its ideological functioning is discussed [ . . . ]. Here we are concerned with what social types are.

In *Heroes, Villains and Fools*, Klapp defines a social type as 'a collective norm of role behaviour formed and used by the group: an idealized concept of how people are expected to be or to act'. (p.11) It is a shared, recognisable, easily-grasped image of how people are in society (with collective approval or disapproval built into it).

On the basis of this Klapp proceeds to provide a typology of the prevalent social types in America, and he frequently provides stars' names to illustrate the different social types. Thus under 'heroes of social acceptability', he lists Will Rogers, Sophie Tucker and Perry Como, and under 'snobs' he lists Grace Kelly, Elizabeth Taylor, Ingrid Bergman, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Katharine Hepburn, Garbo and Davis. (A star may of course be listed under several different, even contradictory categories, reflecting both the ambiguity of their image and the differences in audience attitudes – thus Monroe for instance is used as an example of 'love queen' and 'simpleton', while Liberace is a 'charmer', a 'dude', a 'deformed fool' and a 'prude'.) The star both fulfills/incarnates the type and, by virtue of her/his idiosyncrasies, individuates it. (Critics committed to individualism as a philosophy or tenet of common sense tend to speak of the star's individuation of a type as 'transcendence'.)

There are problems with Klapp's work. Firstly, he does not explore the sources of social types, seeing them simply as 'collective representations'. He sees social types as positive and useful, as opposed to stereotypes, which are wrong and harmful because they deal with people 'outside of one's cultural world' – yet he never examines just who is within and without the 'cultural world'. That is, he never examines the possibility that the cultural world articulated by social types may represent the hegemony of one section of society over another. Yet it is clear from his typology that if you are not white, middle-class, heterosexual and male you are not going to fit 'the cultural world' too well – women only fit uneasily, whilst blacks, gays and even the working-class hardly fit at all. (I have discussed this in *Gays and Film*.) Secondly, one does rather wonder where his categories come from, how he arrived at them. There is no discussion of methodology in his writings.

Nevertheless, despite all this, one can I think use Klapp's typology as a description of prevalent social types, providing one conceptualises this ideologically (i.e. he is describing the type system subscribed to by the dominant groups in society) and of course allows for modifications and additions since he wrote.

Three prevalent social types:  
the Pin-up.

### 1) *The good Joe*

Klapp takes the 'good Joe' ethos'. He is

. . . friendly and easy  
himself above others but  
but also a he-man whose  
rights are concerned.

He is characterised by

. . . dislike of bullies,  
for the underdog; and  
his rough-and-ready a  
wife. (ibid.)

and is to be distinguished from  
Como, Bing Crosby, Lucille  
and William Holden.

Failure to understand  
the misunderstanding

Klapp is right to pinpoint the  
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John Wayne as a good Joe

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Three prevalent social types as defined by Klapp are the Good Joe, the Tough Guy, and the Pin-up.

1) *The good Joe*

Klapp takes the 'good Joe' or 'good fellow' as 'the central theme of the American ethos'. He is

. . . friendly and easy going; he fits in and likes people; he never sets himself above others but goes along with the majority; he is a good sport – but also a he-man who won't let anyone push him around where basic rights are concerned. (p.108)

He is characterised by

. . . dislike of bullies, snobs, authoritarians, and stuffed shirts; sympathy for the underdog; and liking for the good Joe or regular fellow who, for all his rough-and-ready air wouldn't try to dominate anybody, not even his wife. (ibid.)

and is to be distinguished from squares, sissies and eggheads. Star examples are Perry Como, Bing Crosby, Lucille Ball, Will Rogers, Pat Boone, Eddie Cantor, Bob Hope and William Holden.

Failure to understand the good Joe complex I believe is a major source of the ~~misunderstanding~~ <sup>misunderstanding</sup> of Americans by non-Americans. (p.109)

Klapp is right to pinpoint the good Joe as the central American social type, although we should ask questions as to what it also suppresses or conceals, at what cost this good Joeism is achieved. Although Klapp maintains that women can be good Joes, his description excludes this (women cannot be he-men, do not have wives . . .); and the implicit, taken-for-granted maleness of the type is reinforced by its opposition to sissies. Equally the opposition to eggheads can also be (as Klapp does hint) a resistance to any attempt to think outside of dominant beliefs and the *status quo*.

John Wayne as a good Joe

Although John Wayne is many things besides being a good Joe, a useful way of studying his image and the good Joe complex is to analyse his films in terms of the way his easy-going, self-contained, male stance is affirmed by (a) differentiating him from other characters (including women, villains and other men who don't 'fit' – see the Hawks Westerns with Wayne for an examination of how a man (or a woman) 'fits' and how he or she does not) and (b) dissolving ideological tensions in the 'unanswerable' good Joe normalcy of his presence (e.g. war films such as *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and *The Green Berets*). It needs to be added, of course, that not all Wayne's roles would meet this analysis, because of, for example, casting against type, villainous inversions, self-reflexive roles, etc., and that there are aspects of his image – his

awkwardness with women, his 'hawkish' political stance – that relate ambivalently to it. They may undermine his good Joe-ism – but equally the latter may justify the former.

ii) *The tough guy*

This type is discussed by Klapp in his examination of 'the deterioration of the hero'. Klapp's examples are Mike Hammer, Ernest Hemingway and Little Caesar, but he could have supplemented this with film star examples such as James Cagney, James Bond/Sean Connery or Clint Eastwood. What concerns Klapp about this type is not its existence, but its ambivalence. A disapproved type of violence, aggressivity, callousness and brutality would serve a useful function, so 'it is as hero, not villain, that the tough guy is a problem'. (p.149) The tough guy embodies many values that can make him a hero:

. . . he is like a champ (you have to hand it to him, he licks the others). So long as this is so he has the almost universal appeal of the one who can't be beat. Since he usually fights others as tough as himself, he has a kind of fairness (whereas we should have little trouble rallying against a bully). Another thing that confuses the issues is that sometimes the only one who can beat him is another tough guy . . . Tough guys often display loyalty to some limited ideal such as bravery or the 'gang code', which also makes it possible to sympathize with them. Finally, they may symbolize fundamental status needs, such as proving oneself or the common man struggling with bare knuckles to make good. (p.150)

As a result he confuses the boundaries between good and bad behaviour, presses the anti-social into the service of the social and vice versa. In this instance, the type does not indicate collective approval, disapproval or ridicule, but confusion and ambiguity. Klapp's point is to bemoan the 'corruption of the hero', the collapsing of moral and social categories. I would tend to see it more in terms of the tough guy working through contradictions in the male role, which are disguised in more traditional types (cowboys, swashbucklers, war heroes). This is in some measure born out by Patrick McGilligan's study of James Cagney (*Cagney – The Actor as Auteur*).

McGilligan on Cagney

He sees Cagney as embodying both the positive and the negative connotations of toughness:

At worst, Cagney presents the liberal guise of fascist instincts: the drive to be on top, to go solo, to dominate women, to buy one hundred suits, to succeed – the competitive, individualist, capitalist ethic. At best, he represents an optimistic faith in circumstances, hope in the future, a gritty refusal to be dominated in any situation and a stubborn resistance to accepted social standards and *mores* that is exemplary. (p.181)

What makes McGilligan of an ambiguity or contradiction make connections with specific ideological complications of toughness to notions of the class is present equally in New York East Side Irish causes. Yet, as McGilligan for middle-class and/or fe right-wing themes in the late all the characteristics of the Cagney persona – patriotism toughness and maleness is ragedously masculine in his problematic. It is not so Clarke's face in *The Public* (prod from a clenched fist), Cagney/tough like a man] in only Joan Blondell and Ann examples of the equal heterosexual particular see her 'Partners' (1972). Quite how one assesses this – as images of equality for now. A further aspect of the mother. As McGilligan important because it 'exposes' same time, the almost fanatical films in which it is emphasized 'show the perversion of the wonderful such a family is' by following through the contradictions some of the contradictions

iii) *The pin-up*

As already mentioned, Klapp that, because 'It is still a r (p.97), there are particular modern woman's 'loss of identity should be so – but he did not. It is interesting to note that one that exists primarily in 1 used the term 'glamour girl

Although he does include so is on women:

What makes McGilligan's account useful is that he moves beyond this statement of an ambiguity or contradiction (which is where Klapp basically would leave it) to make connections with specific other aspects of cultural meaning and to explore the ideological complications these connections bring with them. Thus he links Cagney's toughness to notions of the working-class and masculinity. The link with the working-class is present equally in the early film roles, the biographies' stress on Cagney's New York East Side Irish background and in his known championing of 'radical' causes. Yet, as McGilligan show, this working-class toughness – always problematic for middle-class and/or feminist socialists – was easily pressed into the service of right-wing themes in the later films, so that by the time of *One, Two, Three* (1961) '... all the characteristics of the younger Cagney [are] put to the service of the older Cagney persona – patriotic, rightist and complacent' (p.192). The link between toughness and maleness is yet more ambiguous. Cagney was, says McGilligan, 'outrageously masculine in his every action'. As a result his relations with women are problematic. It is not so much the question of violence (the grapefruit in Mae Clarke's face in *The Public Enemy* – the only caress gesture in his repertoire, a gentle prod from a clenched fist), as the notion that 'Only a woman who is tough [tough like Cagney/tough like a man] is a fitting mate for the male Cagney' (p.169). In his career only Joan Blondell and Ann Sheridan really come up to this, forming with Cagney examples of the equal heterosexual couple that Molly Haskell admires (on Cagney in particular see her 'Partners in Crime and Conversion' in *The Village Voice*, Dec. 7, 1972). Quite how one assesses these instances (cf. the Hawksian woman's masculinisation) – as images of equality or as an inability to conceive the feminine – I will leave for now. A further aspect of the link of tough guy/Cagney with maleness is the role of the mother. As McGilligan suggests, Cagney's closeness (on screen) to his mother is important because it 'exonerated the nastier actions of the Cagney character'; at the same time, the almost fanatical devotion of the two has an implicit neurosis, so that films in which it is emphasised, such as *Sinner's Holiday*, *The Public Enemy* and *White Heat* 'show the perversion of the close American family (perhaps unintentionally), not how wonderful such a family is' (p.109). McGilligan's study is an example of the way that, by following through the chains of association of a star's incarnation of a social types, some of the contradictions elided in that type can be explored.

### iii) *The pin-up*

As already mentioned, Klapp's typology is noticeably short on women. He points out that, because 'It is still a man's world when it comes to handing out the medals' (p.97), there are particularly few women hero types, resulting in the dilemma of modern woman's 'loss of identity' (p.98). (He does not get very far in asking why this should be so – but he did observe it at a time when few other writers were doing so.) It is interesting to note that when he does propose a predominantly female type, it is one that exists primarily in media representation – the pin-up. (He could perhaps have used the term 'glamour girl'.)

Although he does include some men in his list of synonyms of the pin-up, the emphasis is on women:

Such a model of bodily perfection need be neither a great lover nor a social lion. Photogenic perfection is enough. It may be surprising to say that a pin-up need not be unusual even in looks (many people have complained of the monotony of American cheesecake and Hollywood beauty). Fashion, cosmetology, and hair styling actually increase the resemblance of pin-up types. (p.39)

One might say, with heroes like that, who needs villains and fools? As a social model, the pin-up promotes surface appearance and depersonalisation, woman as sexual spectacle and sex object.

The pin-up is an important part of the way a star's image is built up, but we should not confuse this with the pin-up as a social type. All the stars we are concentrating on in this study, men as well as women, have had pin-up photographs taken and used, but of these only Monroe and Fonda were 'pin-ups'. They conformed, in their pin-up photos, to the conventions described by Thomas B. Hess in 'Pin-up and Icon':

By the 1940s, the pin-up image was defined with canonical strictness. First of all, there was the 'pin-up girl' herself. She had to be the healthy, American, cheerleader type – button-nosed, wide-eyed, long-legged, ample hips and breasts, and above all with the open, friendly smile that discloses perfect, even, white teeth. Then there is her costume and pose. These must be inviting but not seducing; affectionate but not passionate, revealing by suggestion while concealing in fact. The legs are carefully posed so that not too much of the inner thigh is shown; the navel is covered and so are most of the breasts except for the famous millimeters of 'cleavage'. The body is evident beneath the costume, but not its details – the bulges of nipples or of the *mons veneris* are scrupulously hidden. There is a dialectical pressure at work, between the voyeuristic public which wants to see more and more, and that same public which, in its social function, supports codes and laws that ban any such revelations. Caught between these two forces, the image tends towards an almost Byzantine rigidity, and assumes some of the symbolizing force of an icon. The pin-up girl and the Virgin in Majesty both are instantly legible visual images of the comforting and commonplace which is also ideal, and thus unattainable. (p.227)

Much of the sexual charge of the image is carried by symbolism of various kinds. Hess sees this as produced by censorship and puritanism, forbidding any more direct representation of sexuality. A reading of this following Laura Mulvey's analysis in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' would, on the other hand, put a different emphasis – the pin-up as woman represents the possibility of castration for the male viewer (as do all women for him); to avoid this, a substitute phallus is provided in the form of sexual symbols (including of various obviously phallic kinds) or fetishes. Unless one chooses to accept that all fetishism is to be explained in terms of phallic substitution, I am not sure how far I would go along with this. Sexual imagery may be fetishistic simply in the sense of being a heightening of erotic/sensual surfaces (fur, leather, satin, etc. being 'more like skin than skin'); at the same time it also links

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the woman to other images of power and wealth (e.g. fur, etc., as expensive fabrics; frequent linkage to Art, *haute couture*, leisure, etc.). She may thus be seen as an example of wealth (which the viewer in his fantasy possesses), or as being something that can be obtained through wealth.

In terms of films, the pin-up typing of Monroe and Fonda can be analysed in terms of their visual presentation, how they are kept (or not) within the conventions described above, how the association of images pointed to in the last paragraph is developed. Mulvey also indicates a further aspect for analysis. She suggests that one of the aesthetic consequences of woman as spectacle in film is a tension in films centred on glamorous women stars between the narrative (we want to know what happens next) and the spectacle (we want to stop and look at the woman – Mulvey assumes that the only audience position is constituted in terms of male heterosexuality). It is worth examining a film like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* or *Barbarella* to see how far this is true, and how they 'manage' this tension.

### *Alternative or subversive types*

Most types discussed by Klapp, and indeed most stars discussed as social types, are seen as representing dominant values in society, by affirming what those values are in the 'hero' types (including as those values are relatively appropriate to men and women) and by denouncing other values in the villain and fool types. Klapp argues, however, that there may also be other types that express discontent with or rejection of dominant values. These types will also be grounded in a normative world-view, but as an alternative to the dominant one.

Klapp calls these other types 'anomic types', and his basic examples are 'beat' heroes and 'square' villains and fools. The concept of 'anomie' was developed in sociological theory deriving from Durkheim. Unlike alienation, a term with which it is often confused, anomie is not seen as stemming from inequalities and struggles between social groups (classes, genders, races, minorities). To put the difference between the concepts crudely, we may say that people are said to feel 'anomic' because they do not fit in with prevailing norms and/or because they see the latter's pointlessness, whereas people are said to feel 'alienated' because the goals of society and the norms which carry them are the goals and norms of groups other than those to which the people in question belong. You feel anomic because you are outside society in general; you feel alienated because you are outside the ruling groups in society. From a Marxist perspective, then, Klapp's notion of 'anomic types' is problematic because it is based on the notion of anomie and hence is reducible to an inescapable, quasi-metaphysical *Angst* that does not challenge existing power relations in society. At the same time, the notion of types alternative, or in opposition, to types incarnating dominant values is suggestive and worth pursuing. What we have to examine is whether these types are anomic or alienated, in the senses just defined, and to ask whether these represent real challenges to the *status quo* and the dominant ideology or are simply 'holidays' from it.

i) *The rebel*

The type that springs most readily to mind in this context is 'the rebel'. In her article 'The Rebel Hero', a brief survey of this type, Sheila Whitaker lists John Garfield, Montgomery Clift, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Albert Finney, Paul Newman, Steve McQueen and Jane Fonda as representative of the rebel hero. She stresses different relations of rebellion – the immigrant (Garfield), the rebel against his own class (Clift), generation gap rebels (Brando, Dean), the anti-hero (Newman, McQueen, Finney) and the politically conscious rebel (Fonda). The question with these stars is – to what extent do they really embody oppositional views (and in what terms)?

We can break this question into two parts:–

- a) Are they informed by concepts of anomie or alienation? (I do not mean to imply that they or those responsible for their image were students of sociology; but sociological concepts like anomie and alienation can be seen as theoretical abstractions of widely-known beliefs and understandings – the common sense and political practice of society throw up the theoretical constructs of sociology which enable us to see that sense and that practice with greater clarity.) Are they grounded in material categories or in a generalised *Angst*? The answer does not seem to be clear cut. Immigration and youth are material categories, and one can see Finney and Fonda as embodying working-class and women's situations respectively. However, not all the rebels Whitaker lists can be seen in similar terms, nor is it clear that the rebellion of those who can is actually cast in terms of that material situation. Are Garfield's films *about* the oppression of immigrants? Is Finney in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* a rebel against the middle class? Brando, Dean and Fonda do expressly articulate the situation of youth and women, and could be said to be 'alienated' rebels to that degree;
- b) Do these stars, in expressing rebellion, heavily promote it or recuperate it? In answering this question, we would do as well to remember that in terms of 'effect' we do not really know whether Garfield *et al.* made people more rebellious or not. What we can examine is the degree to which the image points to the legitimacy of rebellion or its inadequacy. In general, I would suggest it does the latter, because of the characteristics of the *type* to which the stars belong and because of the film *narratives* in which they are placed. *The type itself* is problematic because firstly, most of the heroes are either actually anomic or largely so (see above), so that in the case of those that are not, the alienated/materialist elements are liable to be subsumed under anomie. (Garfield, Finney, Fonda are not rebelling as immigrant, worker, woman respectively, but because they don't 'fit' even amongst immigrants, workers and women.) Secondly, the heavy emphasis on youth in the type carries with it the notion of the 'passing phase', the 'inevitable', 'natural' rebellion (often shored up with garbled notions of the Oedipus complex). Youth is the ideal material term on which to displace social discontent, since young people always get older (and 'grow up'). Thus the rebellion of Garfield, Finney or Fonda can be seen as symptomatic of their youth rather than anything else. This process of

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ii) *The independent woman*

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Molly Haskell on the supe

In *From Reverence to Rape*, between the superfemale : different points in her car



displacement reflects that analysed in *Resistance through Rituals*,<sup>7</sup> whereby press reaction to youth movements of the fifties and sixties is shown to have consistently avoided recognising these movements as class-specific. Thirdly, the type is very little connected to the basic structures of society. Class really only has relevance in the case of Finney. Most of the heroes are male in very traditional ways (often enforced by generic associations from the Western and the thriller), though I would agree with Jack Babuscio that Clift and Dean, who were both gay, did something to launch a non-macho image of a man.<sup>8</sup> Fourthly, inarticulacy (a symptom of anomie) is the defining characteristic of the type, and it inhibits him/her from any analysis of his/her situation. (Fonda is, of course, the exception to the last two points. It may be that I am wrong to follow Whitaker's inclusion of her alongside Garfield *et al.* It may be that the cinematic rebel type is defined by being male and inarticulate, and that Fonda is a different type altogether. At the same time, many of the other points that can be made about the 'rebelliousness' of the rebel type do seem applicable to her attempt to embody radical attitudes.) The *narratives* of the films in which these stars appeared tend to recuperate rather than promote the rebellion they embody. This is partly due to the way in which they tend to develop the problem of the hero as an individual, quasi psychological problem. The fault is liable to be located in her or him and not in the society in which she or he lives (e.g. *The Wild One*, *Klute*). When there is some suggestion that the problem lies outside the hero, then this problem is often defined as the failure of some persons in her or his world to live up to traditional concepts and dominant values. James Dean's two 'youth' films, *Rebel Without A Cause* and *East of Eden*, seem to me to indicate that the character played by Dean has problems that are not only his psychological hang up but in the family situation in which he lives. This does not mean, however, that the films are critical of the family as an institution, but rather of the failure of the parents of the Dean character to fulfill adequately their familial roles. In *Rebel* he has too weak a father, in *Eden* too charismatic a mother. In other words, the rebellion against family is recuperated because it is against an inadequate family rather than the family as a social institution.

#### *i) The independent woman*

Perhaps one of the reasons for the almost implacable recuperation of the rebel type is that she or he is too obviously oppositional to social values. A more covert example is the independent woman type (or series of types) embodied by Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Barbara Stanwyck, Rosalind Russell, Joan Crawford and others during the thirties and forties. Do these stars represent a more complete alternative or opposition to dominant values?

#### Molly Haskell on the superfemale and the superwoman

In *From Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell suggests a distinction within these stars between the superfemale and the superwoman. (The same star may be both types at different points in her career.) The superfemale is:

... a woman who, while exceedingly 'feminine' and flirtatious, is too ambitious and intelligent for the docile role society has decreed she play. ... She remains within traditional society, but having no worthwhile project for her creative energies, turns them onto the only available material – the people around her – with demonic results. (p.214)

The chief example of this category is Bette Davis, particularly in *Of Human Bondage*, *Jezebel*, *The Little Foxes*, *Dangerous*, *Dark Victory* and *Mr. Skeffington*. The superwoman is:

... a woman who, like the superfemale, has a high degree of intelligence or imagination, but instead of exploiting her femininity, adopts male characteristics in order to enjoy male prerogatives, or merely to survive. (ibid.)

The chief examples here are Joan Crawford as Vienna (in *Johnny Guitar*) and Katharine Hepburn.

This is a suggestive distinction, although it could do with some working-up to be made more directly usable. Is it just a question of the difference between roles within and without the domestic arena? Are there characteristic narrative patterns that structure the representation of the two types? What is the relationship between the star as a total image and the specific character constructed in given films? Are the types carried by physical features, iconography of dress and gesture, modes of performance? These are genuine questions, not disguised attacks on Haskell's distinction. Answering them would be a way of clarifying the distinction and how it operates.

There is a second order of problems with the distinction, and that is how the superfemale or the superwoman actually embodies a radical alternative/opposition to prevalent female types. The 'superfemale' seems inevitably to be shown as demonic in her actions, and it is hard to distinguish her too firmly from other 'strong', 'magnetic' types such as the 'bitch' (Davis), the *femme fatale*, and the intellectual/aristocratic type (Hepburn), all of which strongly discount the value of female strength and intelligence. At most, the superfemale type seems capable of articulating the damage done when a person of great capacities is confined to a demeaning or over-restricted world.

The superwoman on the other hand raises a more complex set of problems. What exactly is going on when a female character 'adopts male characteristics'? There are perhaps two ways of understanding this.

*On the one hand*, one can recognise that 'characteristics' of personality are not gender-specific (there is nothing innately male about aggressiveness or innately female about gentleness), but that, for whatever historical-cultural reasons, certain characteristics are associated with one gender rather than the other and that, as a consequence, individual women and men have a great deal invested (in terms of their identities as women and men) in preserving the association between such-and-such a characteristic and one gender or the other. This means that attempts to alter this, to cross gender barriers, to adopt the characteristics associated with the opposite sex, is a matter of negotiation, of working out a way of doing this which both frees

people from the constraints of their self-identities. The especially, Katharine Hepburn, humiliated and still rebelling, defer to him and still superwoman:

... is able to achieve, to insist on *The Way of the Wagon* been struck of course

As Claire Johnston argues, between men and women ignores 'the question of critique of patriarchal control simply as people decide it prevents this, where the relationships between them (the romantic one), as a 'utopian' (than how to get there), that Haskell could be accepted develops it, however, they seem to have to do all concessions); it might be far Tracy is prepared to strain of anti-gayness in her women and men is also heterosexually normative

*On the other hand*, some argue there is no such thing as 'gender' unable to conceive of, or that the only way a woman can still ultimately threatening way without gender. Although of her accounts of the superwoman Joan Blondell and James Cagney

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and she quotes a very revealing *Like A Letter, Darling*, in which competitors -- all men -- c

people from the constrictions of gender-roles and yet does not utterly damage their self-identities. This seems to be the kind of process that Haskell admires in, especially, Katharine Hepburn. In her relationship with Spencer Tracy, 'Tracy can be humiliated and still rebound without (too much) loss of ego. Hepburn occasionally can defer to him and still not lose her identity'. (p.230) More generally, Hepburn's superwoman:

... is able to achieve her ends in a man's world, to insist on her intelligence, to insist on using it, and yet be able to 'dwindle', like Millamant in *The Way of the World*, 'into marriage', but only after an equal bargain has been struck of conditions mutually agreed on. (p.230)

As Claire Johnston has pointed out, the emphasis in Haskell on 'reconciliation between men and women ... flexibility of role playing, "love" and camaraderie' ignores 'the question of the nuclear family [that] has been central to the feminist critique of patriarchal culture' (*Screen* vol.16 no.3 p.121), and treats the problem simply as people deciding to relate better to each other rather than analysing what prevents this, where the roles come from. However, perhaps as a model of how relationships between the sexes might be conducted (a practical ideal rather than a romantic one), as a 'utopian' expression (telling us where we want to get to, rather than how to get there), the negotiated adoption of 'male characteristics' celebrated by Haskell could be acceptable as an alternative/oppositional statement. As she herself develops it, however, there are I think two further problems. One is that the women seem to have to do all the running, make all the moves (including most of the concessions); it might be worth examining one of the Tracy Hepburn films to see how far Tracy is prepared to adopt 'female characteristics'. The second is that there is a strain of anti-gayness in her writing, which suggests that the ideal relationship between women and men is also the ideal human relationship — in other words, Haskell is heterosexually normative (or heterosexist).

*On the other hand*, some recent feminist theory suggests that in a patriarchal culture there is no such thing as 'the female', only the non-male.<sup>9</sup> That is to say that films are unable to conceive of, or to cope with, anything that is female, which means in effect that the only way a woman can be accepted as a person (except as a demeaned, and ultimately threatening, sexual object) is for her to become 'non-male'; that is to say without gender. Although Haskell herself does not work within these terms, some of her accounts of the superwoman stars do support it. Thus the relationship between Joan Blondell and James Cagney in *Blonde Crazy* is based on:

... the unspoken understanding that a woman is every bit the 'gentleman' or nongentleman — as a man is and can match him in wits and guts and maybe even surpass him. (p.130)

and she quotes a very revealing piece of dialogue from the Rosalind Russell film *Like A Letter, Darling*, in which Robert Benchley, her boss, complains that her competitors — all men — don't understand her

'They don't know the difference between a woman and a . . .'

'A what?' Russell asks.

'I don't know,' Benchley replies, 'there's no name for you.'

The Hawks women that Haskell admires are accepted into the male group, as soon as they cease to be womanly – Jean Arthur in *Only Angels Have Wings* is a striking case in point. What seems to me to be happening in the narrative of these films is that there is a contempt for female characteristics yet an obligation to have woman characters. This problem is resolved in the person of the woman who becomes a man (almost). What one thinks about this procedure depends upon one's politics, and in particular whether one does despise female characteristics or whether one sees them as, certainly, oppressed and not, potentially anyway, gender specific, yet still nonetheless representing real strengths and values that form the basis and power of the women's movement.

#### Narrative and the independent woman

The 'independence' of the stars under consideration here is expressed both in the characters they play and in what was reported about them in magazines (e.g. Davis's fight with Warner Brothers over her contract. Hepburn's intellectual background, Crawford's struggle to the top from a background of poverty). Do the narratives of the films they appear in legitimate and promote this image, or undermine it?

The endings of the films usually involve a 'climb-down' on the part of the star. As Elizabeth Dalton observes, in a survey of Warner Brothers' films about working women:

A woman could be resourceful, intelligent, even cynical, for 59 minutes but in the last two, she would realise that it was love and marriage that she really wanted.

(*'Women at Work: Warners in the Thirties'*, p.17)

This dénouement may also involve punishment and humiliation for the star – not only at the hands of the male character(s), but at the hands of the film itself. In *His Girl Friday*, when Rosalind Russell corners the sheriff who wants to avoid her questions, she is filmed in a way that makes her look comic, not resourceful. *Mildred Pierce* blames Mildred/Crawford for the death of her youngest daughter; despite the fact that the latter is in the care of her father at the time, the film manages to put the blame onto Mildred/Crawford for her independence. Though there are exceptions to the rule, the narratives do not appear to legitimise independence.

Haskell, however, has argued that, in a sense, these endings do not matter. What we remember is the independence not the climb-down or the humiliation:

We see the June bride played by Bette Davis surrender her independence at the altar; the actress played by Margaret Sullavan in *The Moon's Our Home* submit to the straitjacket in which Henry Fonda enfolds and symbolically subjugates her; Katharine Hepburn's Alice Adams achieve her highest ambitions in the arms of Fred MacMurray; Rosalind Russell as an

advertising executive in arms; Joan Crawford a *Bride* go weak at the knees Douglas. And yet we remember the aggressive reporter Fonda on a wild-geese chase Hepburn standing on top Russell giving MacMurray Crawford looking about

(Of course, we cannot know think one could argue that in *ance, mise en scène*, etc., the in climb-down resolutions. Two narratives do not seem invariably the independent woman star explain, and explain away, stars, and not just fictional climb of the film may matter less than star phenomenon emphasise circumstances of particular

Marjorie Rosen in *Popcorn* woman films always show them. It is men who define the man, that the star acts as she

It's unfortunate that Hollywood acumen unless she was a scoop to prove herself (p.147)

It's hard to say how true independence *threatening* her suggested by Rosen may also once any autonomy. Now, *Voyage* liberation from the dowdy spirit (Claude Rains), who 'gives' her provides her with her ultimate element is certainly there, progressive elements in the film suspect this narrative aspect, rather than an utter denial of

#### Extraordinary women

As Molly Haskell herself has signalled as being exceptional

advertising executive in *Take A Letter, Darling* find happiness in the same arms; Joan Crawford as the head of a trucking firm in *They All Kissed The Bride* go weak at the knees at the sight of labor leader played by Melvyn Douglas. And yet we remember Bette Davis not as the blushing bride but as the aggressive reporter and sometime-bitch; Margaret Sullavan leading Fonda on a wild-goose chase through the backwoods of Vermont; Katharine Hepburn standing on the 'secretarial stairway' to independence; Rosalind Russell giving MacMurray the eye as her prospective secretary; and Joan Crawford looking about as wobbly as the Statue of Liberty. (pp.3-4)

Of course, we cannot know what 'we' – the audience in general – remember, but I think one could argue that in terms of emphasis, weighting within the film, performance, *mise en scène*, etc., the independence elements are stronger, more vivid, than the climb-down resolutions. Two observations support this. One, unlike the rebels, the narratives do not seem invariably to point to inadequacies in the psychology of either the independent woman stars or the people of their immediate environment to explain, and explain away, their independence. Two, because we are dealing with stars, and not just fictional characters, the specific details of what happens in the plot of the film may matter less than the 'personality' that the film as a whole reveals – the star phenomenon emphasises the kind-of-person the star is rather than the specific circumstances of particular roles.

Marjorie Rosen in *Popcorn Venus* argues that the narratives of the independent woman films always show the star's independence and intelligence in the service of men. It is men who define the social goals and norms; it is to get a man, or for love of a man, that the star acts as she does:

It's unfortunate that Hollywood could not visualize a woman of mental acumen unless she was fixing up a mess her man/boss had made, covering a scoop to prove herself to a man, or deftly forging a life of dishonesty. (p.147)

It's hard to say how true this really is. Many of the films are about the star's independence *threatening* her relationship with the man she loves, but the pattern suggested by Rosen may also operate, thus effectively denying the woman's independence any autonomy. *Now, Voyager* might be a case in point – the narrative details Davis's liberation from the dowdy spinster role imposed on her, yet it is a man, a psychiatrist (Claude Rains), who 'gives' her the 'means' to be free, and a man (Paul Henreid) who provides her with her ultimate project in life, namely, his daughter. Whilst this element is certainly there, it does not – in my opinion – totally undermine the progressive elements in the film. It is just one of the contradictions of the film, and I suspect this narrative aspect, when it is there, often largely acts as a contradiction of rather than an utter denial of 'independence'.

#### Extraordinary women

As Molly Haskell herself has pointed out, the independent women stars are often signalled as being exceptional or extraordinary women. Dietrich, Hepburn, Rosalind

Russell, Davis all have strong upper-class, intellectual or, in the case of Dietrich, exotic associations which make them 'exceptions to the rule, the aristocrats of their sex' (p.160). Haskell argues this 'weakens their political value'. I am not myself so sure of this. All stars are in one way or another exceptional, just as they are all ordinary. The un-extraordinary 'girl next door' types like June Allyson, Doris Day, Betty Grable are no less characteristic of the star phenomenon than are extraordinary types like Hepburn *et al.* It's worth remembering too that other independent women stars – Barbara Stanwyck, Ann Sheridan, Claire Trevor – do not carry upper-class or intellectual associations.

#### Sexual ambiguity and role playing

Many of the stars in the independent woman category were characterised by sexual ambiguity in their appearance and presentation. This can be an aspect of their physical attributes – the broad shoulders of Joan Crawford and Greta Garbo, Katharine Hepburn's height, the 'tough' face of Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis's strutting walk – which, in the case of Crawford, could also be exaggerated by the way she was dressed. It can also be a play on costume, sequences of cross-dressing such as:

Dietrich in white tie and tails, Garbo as the lesbian Queen Christina (although with 'cover' romance), Eleanor Powell in top hat and tails for her tap numbers, and Katharine Hepburn as the Peter Pan-like Sylvia Scarlett; all introduced tantalizing notes of sexual ambiguity that became permanent accretions to their screen identities.

(Haskell, p.132)

This could of course be seen as another instance of cinema being unable to cope with the female and so presenting splendid women as men. However, recent discussion of the cinema in relation to homosexuality has suggested a different emphasis.

Janet Meyer and Caroline Sheldon see these stars as an oblique expression of lesbianism:

The qualities they projected of being inscrutable to the men in the films and aloof, passionate, direct, could not be missed. They are all strong, tough and yet genuinely tender. In short, though rarely permitted to hint it, they are lesbians.

(Janet Meyer, 'Dyke goes to the Movies', p.37)

Sheldon suggests in *Gays and Film* that if we understand lesbianism, not necessarily in purely sexual terms, but in terms of 'woman-identification', then these stars are lesbian. They are 'women who define themselves in their own terms', '... playing parts in which they are comparatively independent of domestic expectations and of men'. Meyer and Sheldon are working within a lesbian feminist political perspective, that will not be acceptable to many (including many feminists), but their emphasis is a useful corrective to Haskell's heterosexist assumptions. Both recognise that lesbianism (in the erotic sense) may be used in film for the titillation of heterosexual men, but

the sense of aloofness, 'other quite overtly erotic relations heterosexual male's pleasure

Jack Babuscio and I have dressing and play on sexual roles are *only* roles and not as part of the phenomenon

Camp, by focusing on and, in particular, sex stars camp is not to mention whole cosmology of our society uses to of those on screen.

In this respect then, independent metaphor which underpins work of Bette Davis. Davis is or any other – stars, yet be code. With most stars, their the personality; but Davis is obviously 'put on'. In certain *About Eve* – this sense of the social expectations and requirements [ . . . ] below of her performance. Streisand. I have discussed this in *We Were in Movie* no. 22.)

#### Notes

- 1 Barbara Gelman (ed.) Martin Levin (ed.), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*
- 2 *Film Pictorial*, September 1936, the series 'Great News'
- 3 *The Talkies*, pp.106–7, . . .
- 4 Solutions to the production of film and war, but also the product differentiation, tag, 'the consumer so Baran and Paul Sweezy
- 5 See note 1 to Part One
- 6 *The Talkies*, pp.136–7, pp.144–7, *Hollywood at War*
- 7 In Tony Jefferson *et al Working Papers in Cultural Studies*

the sense of aloofness, 'otherness', and non-domesticity combined with sometimes quite overtly erotic relationships with women could be seen as subversive of the heterosexual male's pleasure at being titillated.

Jack Babuscio and I have suggested a different emphasis to this, whereby the cross-dressing and play on sexual roles can be seen as a way of heightening the fact that the sex roles are *only* roles and not innate or instinctual personal features. This can be seen as part of the phenomenon of camp in the cinema:

Camp, by focusing on the outward appearances of role, implies that roles and, in particular, sex roles are superficial – a matter of style . . . Finding stars camp is not to mock them . . . It is more a way of poking fun at the whole cosmology of restrictive sex roles and sexual identifications which our society uses to oppress its women and repress its men – including those on screen.

(Jack Babuscio, *Gays and Film*, pp.44, 46)<sup>10</sup>

In this respect then, independent-woman type stars make explicit the life-as-theatre metaphor which underpins the star phenomenon. This can be seen especially in the work of Bette Davis. Davis is one of the most 'mannered' of the independent women or any other – stars, yet being mannered effectively foregrounds manners as a social code. With most stars, their particular manner is seen as a spontaneous emanation of the personality; but Davis is hard to treat in the same way since her manner is so obviously 'put on'. In certain films – *Jezebel*, *The Little Foxes*, *Dark Victory*, *Now, Voyager*, *All About Eve* – this sense of the artifice of social performance meshes with notions of social expectations and requirements, of women and/or of class. (Cf. the discussion [ . . . ] below of her performance in *The Little Foxes*. Another similar instance is Barbra Streisand. I have discussed the possibly subversive effect of her performance in *The Way We Were* in *Movie* no. 22.)

## Notes

- 1 Barbara Gelman (ed.), *Photoplay Treasury*; Richard Griffith (ed.), *The Talkies*; Martin Levin (ed.), *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*.
- 2 *Film Pictorial*, September 30, 1933; reprinted by Peter Way Ltd. in 1972 as part of the series 'Great Newspapers Reprinted'.
- 3 *The Talkies*, pp.106–7, 302–4.
- 4 Solutions to the production of surplus include the expansion of overseas markets and war, but also the stimulation of home consumption through advertising, product differentiation, etc., all leading to an emphasis on consumption, hence the tag, 'the consumer society'. See J.K. Galbraith, *The Consumer Society* and Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*.
- 5 See note 1 to Part One concerning King's work.
- 6 *The Talkies*, pp.136–7, 331; *The Talkies*, pp.140–142, 337; *Photoplay Treasury*, pp.144–7, *Hollywood and the Great Fan Magazines*, pp.94–6.
- 7 In Tony Jefferson *et al.* (eds.), *Resistance through Rituals*, originally published as *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 7/8.

- 8 See Jack Babuscio, 'Screen Gays' in *Gay News* nos. 79 (Dean) and 104 (Clift).
- 9 The *locus classicus* of the view that 'culture is male' is Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*. For a discussion of more recent, psycho-analytically oriented theorisations, see Elizabeth Cowie, 'Woman as Sign', *m/f* no. 1.
- 10 See also Richard Dyer, 'It's being so camp as keeps us going', *Body Politic* (Toronto) no. 36, pp. 11–13.

PART TWO

**The text  
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